

Veterans' Health

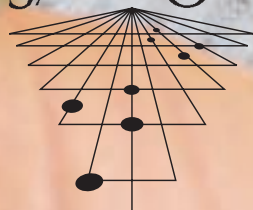
FALL • 2006

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE
FOR OHIO VETERANS

What you
need to know
about the flu

Get the
most from
your next
appointment

VA Healthcare
System of Ohio



To our readers



Welcome to our fall Veterans' Health issue. This season, we're pleased to offer a variety of timely articles on keeping you and your family healthy.

On page 3, we discuss the importance of keeping your medical appointments. As news headlines predict a worldwide bird flu pandemic, we take a look at the bird flu and the seasonal flu, and discuss ways to keep your family flu-free. See pages 4 and 5 for more details.

Enjoy the fall in good health!

John E. Barilich

—John Barilich, Acting Network Director

Leading the way in polytrauma care

Cleveland VAMC designated a Level II Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center

The secretary of Veterans Affairs has designated the Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center as a Level II Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center. There are 21 Level II sites throughout the country that report to one of four Level I sites. Cleveland reports to Minneapolis.

Military personnel serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom have sustained combat-induced polytraumatic injuries requiring intensive and comprehensive rehabilitation care.

Polytrauma refers to patients with two or more diagnoses that include traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury, amputation, visual and hearing impairment, musculoskeletal injuries, wounds and psychological trauma, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

For more information, contact Traci A. Piero, N.P.C., M.S.N., polytrauma network coordinator for VISN 10, at **216-701-6395. VH**

Attention returning military personnel

The following contacts are for men and women returning from OIF/OEF service:

VISN 10 Office

Debbie Page, primary contact
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513-615-6450

Chillicothe VA Medical Center

Annette Damico,
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Mark Mauri, OIF/OEF
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Deborah Polasky Walker,
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Cincinnati VA Medical Center

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513-475-6465

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Marlene Davis-Pierce,
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937-268-6511, x2236
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937-268-6511

Leon Lacy, OIF/OEF outreach
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937-268-6511, x2876

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Susan (Cricket) Gruneisen,
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330-724-7715, x1201

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440-526-3030, x7481

Holly Hirsell, OIF/OEF outreach
coordinator
pager: **440-562-0162** or
440-526-3030, x6891

Calling all women vets

The Ohio Women Veterans' Conference will be held October 28, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., at the AMVETS Post 2256, 818 Tarlton Road in Circleville.

The conference's goal is to provide women veterans with comprehensive information about benefits and opportunities.

Seating is limited. Register online at veteransaffairs.ohio.gov/wom_conf_2006.htm. For more information, call **614-752-8941. VH**



Veterans' Health is published quarterly as a patient education service by VA Healthcare System of Ohio, one of the 21 integrated networks of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The publication is intended to provide information to help you stay well, manage your healthcare and learn about the many health services available through VA. This publication is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your doctor. All articles may be reproduced for educational purposes.

The Mission of VA Healthcare System of Ohio is:

- To provide veterans a continuum of care that is accessible, value-added and cost-effective, and of the highest quality, within an environment of outstanding education and research.
- To promote a culture that supports and develops a caring, compassionate, competent and quality-oriented workforce.

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The doctor will see you now ...

and what to do if you can't see the doctor

Whether you're visiting a healthcare provider for a routine exam, to monitor a chronic disease or because you're not feeling well, it's important to keep your healthcare appointment. Missing appointments can have a harmful effect on your health, especially if you have a chronic condition such as high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes or asthma. By keeping your scheduled visits and working as a partner with your healthcare provider, you increase your chances for living a healthier life.

When you request a clinic appointment, VA Healthcare System of Ohio tries to schedule one for you within 30 days. While that's not always possible, we're doing our best to meet that goal. One way you can help us is by letting us know as soon as you can if you're not able to keep your appointment. This way, we'll be able to offer the time to someone else. When a patient calls with a serious problem, we try to get him or her in to see the doctor the same day.

Of course, there will be times when you can't keep your appointment. When that happens, please call your local VA medical center to cancel as soon as possible and leave a message. Be sure to include the following details in your message:

- your full name

- the last four digits of your Social Security number
- the name of the clinic you're scheduled to visit
- the date of your scheduled appointment
- whether you want to reschedule your clinic visit (in most cases, we can set up a new appointment within two weeks)

Last year, more than 40,000 patients failed to keep their scheduled appointments without calling to cancel. This means we couldn't offer those appointment times to other veterans needing to see a doctor.

At VA Healthcare System of Ohio, we're working to improve your health. For you to do your part to stay healthy, please keep your appointments. If you must cancel, let us know promptly so we can provide timely care and service to other veterans. **VH**



What you need to

With flu season just around the corner, it's never too soon to think about taking care of yourself so you can reduce your chances of getting sick this year.

Just what is the flu? **Seasonal, or common, flu** is a respiratory illness that can be transmitted from person to person. Most people have some immunity to the flu, and a vaccine is available to help prevent the flu.

You might have heard warnings of a **flu pandemic**. An influenza pandemic occurs when a new flu virus emerges for which humans have little or no immunity and no vaccine exists. The symptoms of pandemic flu are more severe than those of seasonal flu, and more frequent complications may occur.

As serious as a flu pandemic is, it's important for you to know that flu pandemics are rare. There have only been three pandemics in the past century (1918, 1957 and 1968).

Outbreaks of seasonal flu, on the other hand, occur almost every winter. Symptoms include fever, headache, extreme fatigue, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose and muscle aches. Stomach symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhea can also occur but are more common in children than in adults. Flu complications can include pneumonia, dehydration and a worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma or diabetes. Children may get sinus problems and ear infections.

Flu viruses spread through respiratory droplets caused by coughing and sneezing. They most often spread from person to person. But, sometimes you can become infected by touching something (such as a telephone) with flu viruses on it and then touching your mouth or nose.



An ounce of prevention

The best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccine each fall. You can get a flu shot or use a nasal spray flu vaccine. The nasal spray can be used only in healthy people between ages 5 and 49. Pregnant women shouldn't use the spray. The shot is recommended for all others and for anyone who has chronic medical conditions.

About two weeks after you receive your vaccine, antibodies develop that protect you against influenza virus. Flu vaccines don't protect against illnesses caused by other viruses, so you still may get a cold or some other bug. October or November is the best time to get a vaccine. But getting a flu shot in December or even later can still improve your chances of not getting the flu, since flu season can last as late as May.

While healthcare providers suggest most people

know about the flu



receive a flu vaccine, some people should not get a flu shot, including:

- people allergic to chicken eggs
- people who have had a severe reaction to flu vaccine in the past
- people who developed Guillain-Barré syndrome within six weeks of getting an influenza vaccine
- children less than 6 months old
- people who have a moderate or severe illness with a fever (wait until you're better before getting the vaccine)

Other precautions

Aside from being vaccinated against the flu, you can reduce your chances of getting sick (or spreading the flu to people you come into contact with) by taking these steps:

- **Cover your nose and mouth** with a tissue when you cough or sneeze and then throw the tissue away.

- **Wash your hands often with soap and water**, especially after you cough or sneeze. If you're not near water, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.

- **Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth.** Germs often spread this way.


- **Avoid close contact with people who are sick.** When you're sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting sick, too.

- **If you get the flu, stay home from work, school and social gatherings.** This will help stop the flu from spreading to others.

Despite all your best efforts, you may still get sick. If you develop flu-like symptoms and

are concerned about your illness, especially if you're at high risk for complications, call your healthcare provider. You have a higher risk of complications if you're 65 or older, have a chronic medical condition, are pregnant or are a young child.

If you do get the flu, get plenty of rest, drink lots of liquids, gargle to soothe a sore throat and avoid using alcohol and tobacco. You can also take medicine such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) to relieve fever and muscle aches. (But never give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms, or a fever.) Your healthcare provider may also prescribe an antiviral medicine for you to take, but be sure to consult with him or her to get your own prescription—never take anyone else's medications.

For more information about the flu, visit www.hhs.gov/flu/ and www.pandemicflu.gov. 



Preparing a healthcare power of attorney

Life is a one-way journey, and contemplating how the trip may end is not easy to do. But it's important to make decisions about your future medical care while your health still allows you to do so—and to put those wishes in writing in a living will.

Because it's impossible to plan for every situation in your living will, choose a person you trust to make healthcare choices for you if you become unable to speak or make your own decisions. A durable power of attorney for healthcare is a legal document that appoints a family member or friend to be your healthcare proxy or agent and to make decisions for you regarding your end-of-life care.

This person's duty is to make treatment choices for you that would follow your wishes if you couldn't

make them yourself. Be sure to tell that person what you want. You should also talk to your healthcare provider.

Preparing a living will—a document that describes the type of medical care you'd want if you were to become unable to make medical decisions—will help your providers follow your wishes and spare your loved ones agonizing decisions. In it you should:

- spell out the measures you wish taken to extend your life
- state if and how you want breathing machines, feeding tubes, oxygen, resuscitation efforts, intravenous fluids or other medications to be used, as well as your wishes about organ or tissue donation
- list specific conditions, such as coma, incurable illness or end-stage dementia, under which the terms of your living will go into effect

Your living will doesn't have to be complicated, but you do need to put everything in writing. Be sure to discuss your advance directive with your loved ones and your healthcare provider and supply copies of your documents to them for safekeeping.

You have the right to:

- be told about your health and health problems and the plans for your treatment
- appoint someone to make healthcare decisions for you if, in the future, you're unable to make those decisions for yourself
- accept or refuse any medical treatment
- indicate what medical treatments you do or don't want if, in the future, you're unable to make your wishes known **VH**

Get the **most** from your next appointment

To maintain good health, you should visit your healthcare provider at least once a year. The following tips can help you get the most out of your visit:

Be prepared. Treat your appointment like a business meeting. Set goals, prepare your questions, gather information and records and organize your thoughts.

Be specific. For each symptom, write down when it began, how it feels, lifestyle changes (job change, new diet, stressful event) that could explain the symptom, if it's better or worse, if it's constant or comes and goes, what triggers the symptom (food, exercise, weather), what relieves it and whether anyone else in your family has it.

List your medicines. Include over-the-counter remedies, vitamins, herbs and supplements. Jot down the doses and how often you take them.

Give the whole truth. Be honest about things that affect your health, like eating too much food or drinking too much alcohol and smoking or using drugs. Remember, the things you tell your provider are private, and if they embarrass you, say so. That way, your provider will have the “big picture” of your condition.

Listen and follow. Listen closely to your provider's instructions and follow them to the letter. Never vary from a prescribed therapy without your provider's prior OK. If you don't understand something, ask your doctor to repeat it.

Do's and don'ts

A trusting relationship with your healthcare provider is one of the most important aspects of your healthcare program. To help it flourish, use these tips to help make each visit worthwhile:

Bring a friend or a relative, if needed, for support and assistance, especially if your condition is serious or you're upset. Don't try to take it all in; someone you trust can help you remember your healthcare provider's advice and instructions.

Prioritize your topics and discuss them in order of importance. That way, the most important topics are covered first. If you need extra time or a second appointment, let the office know. Don't try to cram too many issues into one appointment.

Take notes as you speak with your provider or the office staff, especially during phone conversations.

Keep good records of past treatments or medicines. This can help your doctor diagnose your condition.

Let the VA staff help you as much as they can before you ask to speak with a healthcare provider. They are often able to give you help and advice right away.

Understand what your eligibility level covers before making appointments or seeing specialists. This can help you avoid billing problems later. **VA**



Reaching us is easy

Keep this information handy—when you need us, we'll be there.

Chillicothe VAMC

17273 State Route 104
Chillicothe, OH 45601
740-773-1141

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Athens

510 West Union Street
Athens, OH 45701
740-593-7314

Cambridge

2145 Southgate
Cambridge, OH 43725
(740) 432-1963

Lancaster

1550 Sheridan Drive, Suite 100
Colonnade Medical Building
Lancaster, OH 43130
740-653-6145

Marietta

418 Colegate Drive
Marietta, OH 45750
740-568-0412

Portsmouth

621 Broadway Street
Portsmouth, OH 45662
740-353-3236

Cincinnati VAMC

3200 Vine Street
Cincinnati, OH 45220
513-861-3100

Ft. Thomas VA Campus

1000 So. Ft. Thomas Avenue
Ft. Thomas, KY 41075
859-572-6202

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Bellevue

103 Landmark Drive
Bellevue, KY 41073
859-392-3840

Clermont County

Eastgate Professional
Office Park
4355 Ferguson Drive, Suite 270
Cincinnati, OH 45245
513-943-3680

Dearborn County

710 W. Eads Parkway
Lawrenceburg, IN 47025
812-539-2313

Florence, KY

7711 Ewing Blvd.
Florence, KY 41042
(859) 282-4480

Louis Stokes Wade Park VAMC

10701 East Boulevard
Cleveland, OH 44106
216-791-3800

Brecksville VA Medical Center

10000 Brecksville Road
Brecksville, OH 44141
440-526-3030

Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Akron

55 West Waterloo
Akron, OH 44319
330-724-7715

Canton

733 Market Avenue South
Canton, OH 44702
330-489-4600

East Liverpool

332 West 6th Street
East Liverpool, OH 43920
330-386-4303

Lorain

205 West 20th Street
Lorain, OH 44052
440-244-3833

Mansfield

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Mansfield, OH 44906
419-529-4602

McCafferty

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Cleveland, OH 44113
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New Philadelphia

1260 Monroe Avenue,
#15H
New Philadelphia, OH 44663
330-602-5339

Painesville

7 West Jackson Street
Painesville, OH 44077
440-357-6740

Ravenna

6751 North Chestnut Street
Ravenna, OH 44266
330-296-3641

Sandusky

3416 Columbus Avenue
Sandusky, OH 44870
419-625-7350

Warren

Riverside Square
1400 Tod Avenue NW
Warren, OH 44485
330-392-0311

Youngstown

2031 Belmont Avenue
Youngstown, OH 44505
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Chalmers P. Wylie Outpatient Clinic

543 Taylor Avenue
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Community-Based Outpatient Clinics

Grove City

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Grove City, OH 43123
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Marion

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Marion, OH 43302
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Newark

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Newark, OH 43055
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Zanesville

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Dayton VAMC

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Lima, OH 45804
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Middletown

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